May 2

Happy month of May, everyone!

Today we turn to the book of Esther, one of only two of the 66 books of the Bible named after a woman (the other being the Book of Ruth).

The story told in Esther is, frankly, quite the soap opera. It takes place in about 479 BC in Susa, the capital of the Persian empire. At the start of our story, the king, Xerxes, holds a banquet for his friends in the royal palace over the course of several days. Scripture tells us that “Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king’s liberality” (1:7).

After many days of drinking and partying, the king asks his wife, Queen Vashti, to come and make an appearance. Really, he wants to show her off as his “trophy wife” to his wine-soaked friends. However, the queen will have none of it, and she refuses. We then learned that the king, now embarrassed in front of his friends, “became furious and burned with anger” (1:12). He consults with his friends and after deliberation, takes their advice to banish Queen Vashti from his presence and to search the kingdom for a new queen.

Throughout our study this week, we will see how this story unfolds and how God’s plan for His chosen people will not be hindered, not even by a powerful Persian king.

For today, however, what is our lesson? One of the principles that people in recovery from addiction learn is this: “My first reaction is almost never my best reaction.” This has often been true throughout Scripture as well, starting with Eve and then her son Cain. As we will see, it also would have been true for Xerxes if it weren’t for God’s intervention - not for Xerxes’ purpose, but for God’s.

Contrast these “first reactions” with what we learned last week from Nehemiah, who when confronted with a difficult situation or problem, always stepped back and prayerfully consulted the Lord first before doing anything.

And so, I think our lesson today is this: to be sure, we are called to action. But not action that is impetuous or taken in the heat of the moment. Rather, we are called to action that is bathed in prayer and the discernment that comes with seeking God’s wisdom.

Tomorrow: Esther arrives.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
May 3
Grace and peace to you this day.

As our story unfolds, King Xerxes has banished his queen, Queen Vashti, permanently from his presence and has issued a decree for a search to be conducted throughout the kingdom for “beautiful young virgins for the king” (2:2).

In the meantime, a man named Mordecai, who was Jewish, and whose family had been sent into exile a hundred years earlier by the Babylonians (who had since been conquered by the Persians) lives in the Persian capital of Susa. His niece, Esther, is under his care since Esther’s mother and father had died. Esther is described as being “lovely in form and features” (2:7), and thus is chosen to be among the girls who will be members of the king’s harem as well as a candidate to be the new queen.

However, “Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so” (2:10). In time, Esther is presented to the king, “who was attracted to her more than any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval” and became the new queen (2:17).

At the same time, Mordecai learns of a plot to assassinate the king and reports it to Esther, who reports it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. After investigating the matter, the king has the two assassins hanged.

So, what exactly is going on here? What is God’s purpose? Mordecai tells his niece not to reveal her Jewish heritage, but her physical beauty and charm overtake the king to the point that he names her as the new queen on the spot.

And why include this passing detail about Mordecai learning of the assassination plot?

Even though a hundred years had passed, the Jewish exiles were still considered second-class citizens. Mordecai must have known that Esther had a chance at becoming the queen, hence his admonition not to reveal her Jewish background. Is God permitting a deception on His behalf, or is something else going on here?

Tomorrow: The plot thickens with a man called Haman.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
May 4

Greetings, DGCC Family.

Esther is now the queen, though her uncle, Mordecai, has directed her not to reveal her Jewish heritage. At this point in our story, a new character arrives: the court official Hahan. Since appointing Esther as his queen, King Xerxes had elevated Haman “to a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles” (3:1). As such, all the other court officials were required to bow down in his presence, and all of them did, except for one: Mordecai. The court officials asked Mordecai why he refused to do so, and he replied that “he was a Jew” (3:4). Mordecai’s refusal “enraged” Haman (3:5).

Let’s pause here for a moment. The king himself had commanded that all bow down in the presence Haman. One did not simply disobey the king. To do so was to risk execution. And yet, Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman, and in doing so directly disobeys the king, and in response, for the first time, reveals that he is Jewish.

Mordecai surely knew that God had sent the Jewish people into exile a hundred years earlier principally for their ongoing sin of idolatry, that is, “bowing down” to anyone or anything that is not God. And yet here we see that Mordecai risks his own life so as not to repeat the sin of his forefathers.

As the story continues, we see that it is not only his life that Mordecai places in jeopardy, but those of all the Jewish people throughout the kingdom. One did not simply disobey the king. To do so was to risk execution. And yet, Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman, and in doing so directly disobeys the king, and in response, for the first time, reveals that he is Jewish.

Mordecai learns of this, and goes to Esther, telling her that she must go to the king and “beg for mercy and plead with him for her people” (4:8). Esther replies that no one is allowed to enter the king’s presence unless they are summoned. To do otherwise meant certain death. And then Mordecai utters one of the most memorable lines in all of Scripture: “And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this” (4:14). Hearing this, Esther asks Mordecai to gather all the Jews in the city together and to fast for three days, and afterwards she will go to the king, telling Mordecai, “And if I perish, I perish” (4:16).

Tomorrow: The final episode.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
May 5

Grace and peace to all of you today.

Esther goes to her husband the king, who grants her an audience and says she can have anything she wants. Through a series of events, Esther asks the king to spare her life and the life of her people. The king, outraged, and not realizing yet that the decree he had issued was for the Jewish people, because Haman had kept that detail from him, asked Esther who could do such a wicked thing. Esther reveals that it was Haman, and the king has Haman hanged from the gallows Haman had previously built to hang Mordecai.

Earlier, the king had remembered that it was Mordecai who had saved him from assassination, though he (the king) had failed to reward him. As a result, he elevated Mordecai to the highest position in the land next to the king himself.

So, what do we make of all of this? What is our lesson from this story that is 2,500 years old? For that, I return to the Scripture from yesterday: “And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this” (4:14).

Have you ever wondered why God has placed you where you are? Have you ever looked back at your life, seen how it has unfolded, and marveled at how God has orchestrated the events in your life that only now make sense to you? Have you ever been in a difficult or uncomfortable situation or circumstance and realized that God has placed you in that place and in that time for His purpose?

As children of the King, we hold positions of royalty. So as Mordecai said to Esther 2,500 years ago, so does the Word of God say to us today: “And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this” (4:14).

IHS,

Pastor Lou
May 6

Happy Friday, everyone! Here's your musical devotional for today. Turn up the volume and enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CKCThJB5w0

IHS,

Pastor Lou